

Testimony of Joseph Shortt
Independence Northwest; Center for Independent Living of Northwest CT, Inc.
February 17 2011
Department of Social Services Budget

Good evening. My name is Joseph Shortt and I'm a Southbury resident. I am here to testify on behalf of CT Independent living centers, in opposition of the proposed budget reduction. I am an Independent Living advocate and the Youth Transitional Recourse Counselor at Independence Northwest. Independence Living Centers offer essential services to children, adults, and elders with ALL disabilities, so they can live independent lives within the community. Independence Northwest is one of the five independent living centers (ILC's) that are facing a severe reduction in State funding

In 2002 I was paralyzed by a drunk driver. I was 21 at the time and had no idea about how to live independently with this type of disability or what my future would be like. During this period of my life there were a lot of challenges to overcome and I relied heavily on the guidance of individuals with similar disabilities to help me overcome those challenges. I was determined to not let my disability interfere with my quality of life and eventually I was able to live independently again. I took it upon myself to go back to school and eventually earned my Bachelors Degree in Social Work from Western Connecticut State University. I was Fortunate to have an internship at Independence Northwest once I graduated and was hired full time as an Independent Living Advocate once my internship period expired. Now I am able to pass on the knowledge that I acquired over the last ten years of being disabled to individuals who are in the position I was once in. Individuals who don't know where to turn for assistance, who need peer counseling, and in many cases need an advocate. The services offered by Independent Living Centers are Crucial for the well being of individuals living with a disability.

For those of you who are unfamiliar with the services Independent Living Centers offer, I will provide you with a brief overview. Independent Living Centers provide four core services to anyone with a disability. They are advocacy, peer mentoring, information & referrals, and independent living skills training. Along with their core services, each center has specific programs to meet the need of their geographical area. Independence Northwest covers north western Connecticut. They are an Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC) and are the first place to go to get accurate, unbiased information on all aspects of life related to aging or living with a disability. They provide information on a broad range of programs and services, help people understand the various long term care options available to them, help people apply for programs and benefits, and serve as the access point for publicly-funded long term care. Another program offered by Independence Northwest is the Housing Opportunities for Persons With Aids (HOPWA) program. The Housing Opportunities for Persons with Aids (HOPWA) program provides housing assistance and supportive services for low-income people with

HIV/AIDS and related diseases, and their families. People with AIDS and other HIV-related illnesses often face challenges in meeting personal, medical and housing costs during their illness and this service is imperative to their well being. Independence Northwest offers the Money Follows the Person (MFP) program. Money Follows the Person (MFP) allows people living in nursing homes or other long-term care facilities, who are elderly or disabled to move out and receive services and supports, so they can live in their own homes and communities. Money follows the individual by allowing the state to pay for long-term care in a home and community-based setting rather than an institutional setting. This program saves the state a tremendous amount of money by getting people who can live independently into the community and out of costly nursing homes or institutions. Although there are additional services Independence Northwest offers, the final program I am going to discuss is the Youth Transitional Program. This program serves individuals with disabilities from 16-26 years of age who are transitioning from school to work or high school to post-secondary education. These individuals are faced with an enormous amount of change in their life and need the proper guidance and resources to succeed at achieving independence. I am the Youth Transitional Counselor at Independence Northwest, so I have worked with students who are in need of resources and advocates in order to achieve their goals. I have also worked with numerous individuals who needed to develop independent living skills; otherwise they would not have been able to meet their vocational goals. All of the services offered by Independence Northwest and the other four Independent Living Centers will be impacted tremendously, possibly even being completely eliminated if this budget passed, so I urge you to reconsider the proposed budget cut.

Thank you for your valuable time and consideration.
Sincerely,

Joseph Shortt
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